



ZERO to THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Introduction to Infant and Toddler Social-Emotional Development

Jamie Colvard, Senior Technical Assistance Specialist, ZERO TO THREE
Georgia Infant and Toddler Social-Emotional Health Study Committee

September 12, 2019



A national, nonprofit organization that informs, trains and supports professionals, policy makers and parents in their efforts to improve the lives of infants and toddlers.
ZERO TO THREE:

- trains professionals and build networks of leaders,
- influences policies and practices, and
- raises public understanding of early childhood issues.



Why Infants and Toddlers?

- The earliest years are critical for healthy development.
- We know from science that brains are built from the bottom up.
- During the first three years of life, the brain undergoes its most dramatic development, and children acquire the ability to think, speak, learn, and reason.
- The early experiences of young children will shape the architecture of their brains in enduring ways and build the foundation – whether strong or weak – for their future development.
- The domains of development go hand in hand.



Babies Gain Knowledge at a Staggering Rate: Proliferation of Neural Connections in the First 6 Months



ZERO TO THREE



1 Million New Connections Every Second

newborn

1 month

3 months

6 months



ZERO TO THREE



“There is no such thing as a baby...” D. Winnicott



Social-Emotional Development



The young child's capacity to

- experience, regulate, and express emotions
- form close and secure relationships
- explore the environment and learn

All within the context of

- family
- community
- and cultural expectations for young children

(Zero To Three, 2001)



What is Healthy Social-Emotional Development?

- A sense of confidence and competence
- Curiosity
- Ability to develop good relationships with peers and adults, make friends and get along with others
- Ability to persist at tasks
- Ability to follow directions
- Ability to identify, understand, and communicate your own feelings and emotions
- Ability to constructively manage strong emotions





ZERO to THREE

Georgia Kindergarten Readiness Check

Foundations of School Success

- Engages in independent activities and continues tasks over a period of time.
- Independently follows rules and routines.
- Plays cooperatively with a few peers for a sustained period of time.
- Uses senses to observe, classify, and learn about objects and environment.
- Makes statements and appropriately answers questions about how objects/materials can be used to solve problems.
- Effectively uses words, sentences, and actions to communicate needs, ideas, opinions, and preferences.
- Performs fine-motor tasks that require small-muscle strength and control.



ZERO TO THREE



It is estimated that 9.5%-14.2% of children age 0-5 experience an emotional, relational or behavioral disturbance.



ZERO TO THREE

Risks For and Early Manifestation of Disorders

- Heightened risk for children living in families coping with certain stressors, including:
 - Parental loss
 - Parental substance abuse
 - Parental mental illness
 - Exposure to trauma
- Early warning signs of disorders include:
 - Developmental delays
 - Inconsolable crying
 - Failure to seek comfort from caregivers
 - Lack of curiosity
- Behavioral health problems include:
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Post-traumatic stress disorder
 - Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
 - Obsessive compulsive disorder



ZERO to THREE

Impacts over Time

- Increased risk for poor physical and behavioral health outcomes, including:
 - Physical ailments, such as heart disease and cancer, in adulthood;
 - Mental health conditions, such as depression; and
 - Alcoholism and drug use.
- Negative impact on school readiness and educational attainment, resulting in increased rates of:
 - Preschool expulsion (rate for preschoolers is 3x the rate for K-12 children)
 - Absenteeism;
 - Repeating a grade; and
 - Dropping out of high school.
- Increased risk for juvenile justice and lifelong criminal justice involvement



ZERO to THREE

Intervening Early Can Help

- When behavioral health concerns are identified early, there are services that can redirect the course and place children who are at risk on a pathway for healthy development
 - Screening for social-emotional development
 - Early childhood mental health consultation for child care providers
 - Evidence-based interventions
- Research demonstrates that early prevention and treatment is more beneficial and cost-effective than attempting to treat emotional difficulties and their effects on learning and health after they become more serious

Culture: Parent/Caregiver's Values, Beliefs, and Assumptions

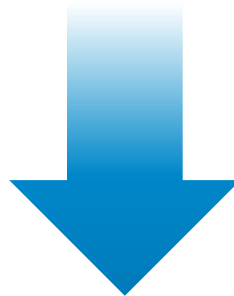


ZERO TO THREE

**Cultural values, beliefs,
and assumptions
shape our**



**Goals and expectations
for children**



**Expression of love
and nurturing**



**Approach to discipline
and limit-setting**

Research informs us that babies are social from the beginning



ZERO TO THREE



- Within the first few days of life, children can show a preference for a caregiver.
- By 1 month, infants know which characteristics (voice, space, touch) go together with a certain person.
- By 3 months, infants can tell the difference between voices and prefer those that are familiar.
- By 4 months, infants begin to form expectations about what their caregivers will be like—gentle and pleasant or upsetting and unavailable.



Definition of Attachment



Attachment is defined as the quality of the relationship. It is the connected, lasting, emotional bonds a child has with a caregiver.

(Lieberman & Zeanah, 1995)

Attachment is NOT a sudden and magical bond, but rather a slow, social unfolding that requires the full participation of both parties.



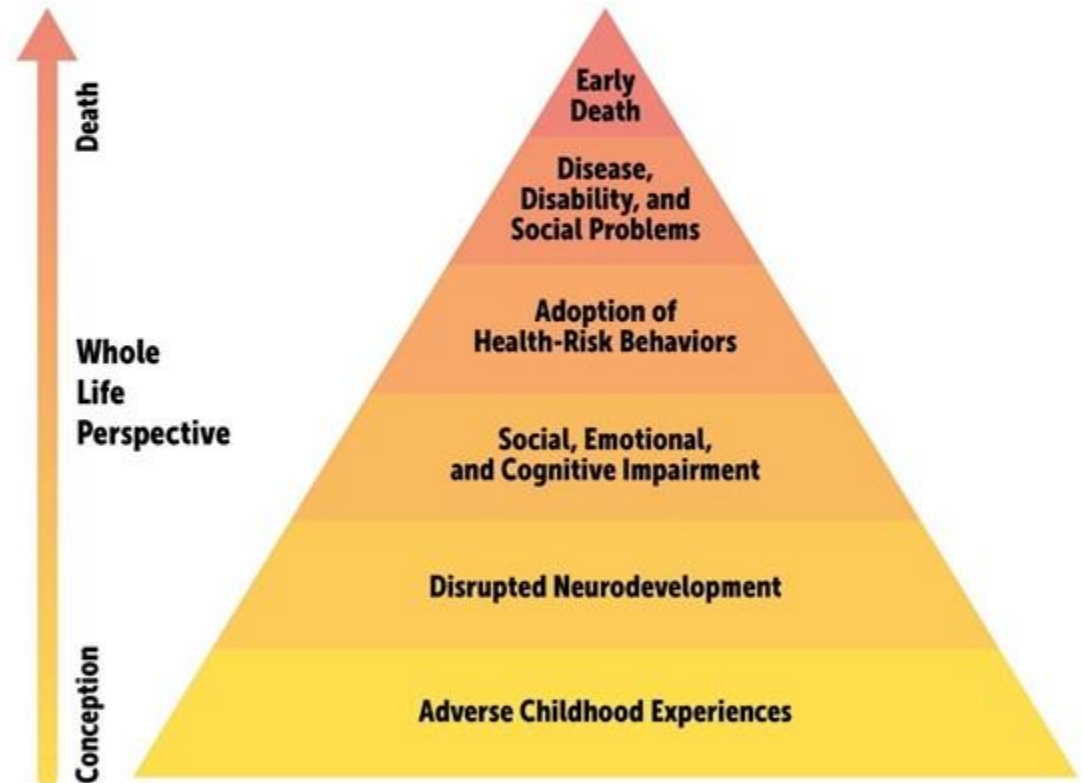
The Long-Term Impact of Toxic Stress

Excessive elevations in:

- Heart Rate
- Blood Pressure
- Stress Hormones

Can impair

- Brain Architecture
- Immune Status
- Metabolic Systems
- Cardiovascular Function





“The miraculous plasticity that allows young brains to quickly learn love and language, unfortunately, also makes them highly susceptible to negative experiences as well.”

(Bruce, Perry D. & Szalavitz, M., 2006)



Protective Factors

Nurturing and
Attachment

Parental Resilience

Social Connections

Concrete Support

Knowledge of
Parenting and Child
Development

Social Emotional
Competence of
Children



Behavior is a Form of Communication



What the infant or toddler is experiencing



What it's like to be in this child's body



What it's like to be in this child's world



ZERO TO THREE

Behavior Communicates

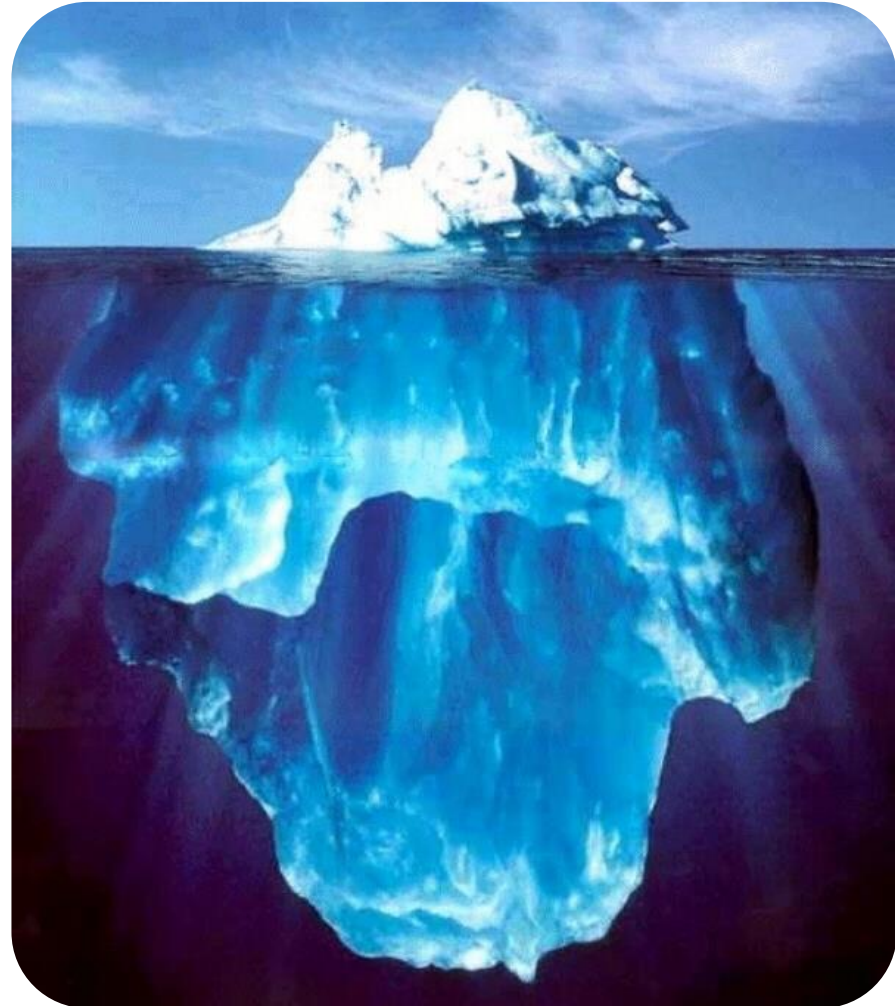
Behavior



Potential unmet need



Skill to be developed





Our Response to “*Bad Behavior*”

- If a child doesn't know how to read, we *teach*.
- If a child doesn't know how to swim, we *teach*.
- If a child doesn't know how to multiply, we *teach*.
- If a child doesn't know how to drive, we *teach*.
- If a child doesn't know how to behave, we ...?

Why can't we finish the last sentence as automatically as we do the others?

Tom Herner (NASDE President) Counterpoint 1998, p.2

How Can We Support Children's Healthy Social-Emotional Development?



ZERO TO THREE



Promotion



Prevention

Developmentally
Appropriate
Assessment and
Diagnosis



Intervention



Increasing intensity and specialization of services and supports



ZERO TO THREE

We All Have a Role To Play



State Actions to Promote Children's Social-Emotional Development



ZERO TO THREE

- Support screening for social-emotional development and maternal depression.
- Ensure Medicaid payment for prevention, promotion and treatment services.
- Invest in prevention through mental health consultation.
- Embed practices focused on social-emotional health in child-serving systems such as primary care, child welfare, and housing.
- Encourage use of a developmentally appropriate assessment tool.
- Train the workforce to ensure all professionals working with young children and families are equipped to identify early warning signs and connect families to support.
- Raise public awareness about healthy social-emotional development.



ZERO to THREE

Early connections last a lifetime

Questions, Reflections, or Comments
